A LETTER from a Clergy-man in the City, *To his Friend in the Country,* Containing his REASONS For not Reading the DECLARATION.

SIR,

I Do not wonder at your concern for finding an Order of Council publiſhed in the *Gazette* for Reading the King's Declaration for Liberty of Conſcience in all Churches and Chappels in this Kingdom. You deſire to know my Thoughts about it, and I ſhall freely tell them; for this is not a time to be reſerved.

Our Enemies who have given our Gracious King this Counſel againſt us, have taken the moſt effectual way not only to ruine us, but to make us appear the Inſtruments of our own Ruine, that what courſe ſoever we take, we ſhall be undone; and one ſide or other will conclude that we have undone our ſelves, and fall like Fools.

To loſe our Livings and Preferments; may our Liberties and Lives in a plain and direct oppoſition to Popery, as ſuppoſe for refuſing to read Maſs in our Churches, or to ſwear to the *Trent*-Creed, is an honourable way of falling, and has the divine comforts of ſuffering for Chriſt and his Religion; and I hope there is none of us but can chearfully ſubmit to the will of God in it. But this is not our preſent Caſe; to read the Declaration, is not to read the Maſs, nor to profeſs the *Romiſh* Faith; and therefore ſome will judge that there is no hurt in reading it, and that to ſuffer for ſuch a Refuſal, is not to fall like Confeſſors, but to ſuffer as Criminals for diſobeying the lawful Commands of our Prince: but yet we judge, and we have the concurring Opinions of all the Nobility and Gentry with us, who have already ſuffered in this Cauſe, that to take away the Teſt and Penal Laws at this time, is but one ſtep from the introducing of Popery; and therefore to read ſuch a Declaration in our Churches, though it do not immediately bring Popery in, yet it ſets open our Church-doors for it, and then it will take its own time to enter: So that ſhould we comply with this Order, all good Proteſtants would deſpiſe and hate us, and then we may be eaſily cruſhed, and ſhall ſoon fall with great diſhonour, and without any pity. This is the difficulty of our Caſe; we ſhall be

cenſured on both ſides, but with this difference: We ſhall fall a little ſooner by not reading the Declaration, if our Gracious Prince reſent this as an act of an obſtinate and peviſh or factious Diſobedience, as our Enemies will be ſure to repreſent it to him; We ſhall as certainly fall, and not long after, if we do read it, and then we ſhall fall unpitied and deſpiſed, and it may be with the Curſes of the Nation, whom we have ruined by our Compliance; and this is the way never to riſe more: And may I ſuffer all that can be ſuffered in this World, rather than contribute to the final Ruine of the beſt Church in the World.

Let us then examine this matter impartially, as thoſe who have no mind either to ruine themſelves, or to ruine the Church: I ſuppoſe no Miniſter of the Church of *England* can give his conſent to the Declaration. Let us then conſider whether reading the Declaration in our Churches be not an interpretative Conſent, and will not with great reaſon be interpreted to be ſo: For,

Firſt, By our Law all Miniſterial Officers are accountable for their Actions: The Authority of Superiours, though of the King himſelf, cannot juſtifie inferiour Officers, much leſs the Miniſters of State, if they ſhould execute any illegal Commands; which ſhews, that our Law does not look upon the Miniſters of Church or State to be meer Machines and Tools to be managed wholly by the Will of Superiours, without exerciſing any Act of Judgment or Reaſon themſelves; for then inferiour Miniſters were no more puniſhable than the Horſes are which draw an innocent man to *Tyburn*: and if inferiour Miniſters are puniſhable, then our Laws ſuppoſe that what we do in obedience to Superiours, we make our own Act by doing it, and I ſuppoſe that ſignifies our Conſent, in the eye of the Law, to what we do. It is a Maxime in our Law, *That the King can do no wrong*; and therefore if any wrong be done, the Crime and Guilt is the Miniſter's who does it: for the Laws are the King's publick Will, and therefore he is never ſuppoſed to command any thing contrary to Law; nor is any Miniſter, who does an illegal Action, allowed to pretend the King's Command and Authority for it: and yet this is the only Reaſon I know, why we muſt not obey a Prince againſt the Laws of the Land, or the Laws of God, becauſe what we do, let the Authority be what it will that commands it, becomes our own Act, and we are reſponſible for it; and then as I obſerved before, it muſt imply our own Conſent.

Secondly, The Miniſters of Religion have a greater tye and obligation than this, becauſe they have the care and conduct of mens Souls, and therefore are bound to take care that what they publiſh in their Churches,

Churches, be neither contrary to the Laws of the Land, nor to the good of the Church: For the Miniſters of Religion are not lookt upon as common Cryers, but what they Read, they are ſuppoſed to recommend too, thô they do no more than Read it; and therefore to read any thing in the Church, which I do not conſent to and approve, nay which I think prejudicial to Religion, and the Church of God, as well as contrary to the Laws of the Land, is to Miſ-guide my People, and to Diſſemble with God and Men; becauſe it is preſum'd, that I neither do, nor ought to read any thing in the Church, which I do not in ſome degree approve. Indeed, let mens private opinions be what they will, in the nature of the thing, he that Reads ſuch a Declaration to his People, teaches them by it: For is not Reading Teaching? Suppoſe then I do not conſent to what I read, yet I conſent to teach my People what I read: and herein is the evil of it; for it may be it were no fault to conſent to the Declaration, but if I conſent to teach my People what I do not conſent to, myſelf, I am ſure that is a great one: And he who can diſtinguiſh between conſenting to read the Declaration, and conſenting to teach the People by the Declaration, when reading the Declaration is teaching it, has a very ſubtile diſtinguiſhing Conſcience. Now if conſenting to read the Declaration be a conſent to teach it my People, then the natural Interpretation of Reading the Declaration, is, That he who Reads it, in ſuch a ſolemn teaching-manner, Approves it. If this be not ſo, I deſire to know, why I may not read an Homily for Tranſubſtantiation, or Invocation of Saints, or the Worſhip of Images, if the King ſends me ſuch good Catholic Homilies, and commands me to read them? And thus we may inſtruct our People in all the points of Popery, and recommend it to them with all the Sophiſtry and artificial Inſinuations, in obedience to the King, with a very good Conſcience, becauſe without our conſent: If it be ſaid, this would be a contradiction to the Doctrine of our Church by Law eſtabliſhed; ſo I take the Declaration to be: And if we may read the Declaration contrary to Law, becauſe it does not imply our conſent to it; ſo we may Popiſh Homilies, for the bare reading them will not imply our conſent, no more than the reading the Declaration does: But whether I conſent to the Doctrine or no, it is certain I conſent to teach my People this Doctrine; and it is to be conſidered, whether an honeſt man can do this.

Thirdly, I ſuppoſe no man will doubt, but the King intends, that our Reading the Declaration ſhould ſignifie to the Nation, our Conſent and Approbation of it; for the Declaration does not want Publiſhing, for it is ſufficiently known already: but our Reading it in our Churches,

muſt ſerve inſtead of Addreſſes of Thanks, which the Clergy generally refuſed, though it was only to Thank the King for His Gracious Promiſes renewed to the Church of *England*, in his Declaration, which was much more innocent, than to publiſh the Declaration itſelf in our Churches: This would perſwade one, that the King thinks our reading the Declaration, to ſignifie our Conſent, and that the People will think it to be ſo. And he that can ſatisfie his Conſcience, to do an action without conſent, which the nature of the Thing, the Deſign, and intention of the Command, and the Sence of the People expound to be a Conſent, may, I think, as well ſatisfie himſelf with Equivocations and mental Reſervations.

There are two things to be anſwered to this, which muſt be conſidered.

I. That the People underſtand our Minds, and ſee that this is matter of Force upon us, and meer Obedience to the King. To which I anſwer,

1. Poſſibly the People do underſtand that the matter of the Declaration is againſt our Principles: But is this any excuſe, that we read that, and by reading recommend that to them, which is againſt our own Conſciences and Judgments? Reading the Declaration would be no Fault at all, but our Duty, when the King commands it, did we approve of the matter of it; but to conſent to teach our People ſuch Doctrines as we think contrary to the Laws of God, or the Laws of the Land, does not leſſen but aggravate the Fault, and People muſt be very good natured to think this an Excuſe.

2. It is not likely that all the people will be of a mind in this matter, ſome may excuſe it, others, and thoſe it may be the moſt, the beſt, and the wiſeſt men, will condemn us for it, and then how ſhall we juſtifie our ſelves againſt their Cenſures? when the world will be divided in their Opinions, the plain way is certainly the beſt, to do what we can juſtifie our ſelves, and then let men judge as they pleaſe. No men in *England* will be pleaſed with our Reading the Declaration, but thoſe who hope to make great advantage of it againſt us, and againſt our Church and Religion: others will ſeverely condemn us for it, and cenſure us as falſe to our Religion, and as Betrayers both of Church and State: and beſides that, it does not become a Miniſter of Religion, to do any thing, which in the opinion of the moſt charitable men can only be excuſed; for what needs an excuſe, is either a fault or looks very like one; beſides this I ſay, I will not truſt mens Charity; thoſe who have ſuffered themſelves in this Cauſe, will not excuſe us for fear of ſuffering; thoſe who are inclined to excuſe us now, will not do ſo when they

they consider the thing better, and come to feel the ill consequences of it: when our Enemies open their eyes, and tell them what our Reading the Declaration signified, which they will then tell us we ought to have seen before, though they were not bound to see it; for we are to guide and instruct them, not they us.

II. Others therefore think, that when we read the Declaration, we should publickly profess, that it is not our own judgment, but that we only read it in obedience to the King; and then our reading it cannot imply our consent to it: Now this is only *Protestatio contra factum*, which all people will laugh at, and scorn us for: for such a solemn reading it in the time of Divine Service, when all men ought to be most grave and serious, and far from dissembling with God or Men, does in the nature of the thing imply our approbation; and should we declare the contrary, when we read it, what shall we say to those who ask us, Why then do you read it? But let those who have a mind try this way, which, for my part, I take to be a greater and more unjustifiable provocation of the King, than not to read it; and, I suppose, those who do not read it, will be thought plainer and honester men, and will escape as well as those who read it and protest against it: and yet nothing less than an express Protestation against it will salve this matter; for only to say, they read it meerly in obedience to the King, does not express their dissent: it signifies indeed, that they would not have read it, if the King had not commanded it; but these words do not signifie, that they disapprove of the Declaration, when their reading it, though only in obedience to the King, signifies their approbation of it, as much as actions can signifie a consent: let us call to mind how it fared with those in King *Charles* the First's Reign, who read the *Book of Sports*, as it was called, and then preached against it.

To return then to our Argument; If reading the Declaration in our Churches be in the nature of the action, in the intention of the command, in the opinion of the People, an interpretative consent to it, I think my self bound in conscience not to read it, because I am bound in conscience not to approve it:

It is against the Constitution of the Church of *England*, which is established by Law, and to which I have subscribed, and therefore am bound in conscience to teach nothing contrary to it, while this Obligation lasts:

It is to teach an unlimited and universal Toleration, which the Parliament in 72. declared illegal, and which has been condemned by the Christian Church in all Ages:

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It is to teach my People, that they need never come to Church more, but have my free leave, as they have the King's, to go to a Conventicle, or to Maſs:

It is to teach the diſpenſing Power, which alters, what has been formerly thought, the whole Conſtitution of this Church and Kingdom: which we dare not do, till we have the Authority of Parliament for it:

It is to recommend to our People, the choice of ſuch perſons to ſit in Parliament, as ſhall take away the *Teſt* and *Penal Laws*, which moſt of the Nobility and Gentry of the Nation have declared their judgment againſt:

It is to condemn all thoſe great and worthy Patriots of their Country, who forfeited the deareſt thing in the World to them, next a good Conſcience, *viz.* The favour of their Prince, and a great many honourable and profitable Employments with it, rather than conſent to that Propoſal of taking away the *Teſt* and *Penal Laws*, which they apprehend deſtructive to the *Church of England* and the *Proteſtant Religion*; and he who can in conſcience do all this, I think need ſcruple nothing.

For let us conſider further, what the effects and conſequences of our reading the Declaration are likely to be, and I think they are matter of Conſcience too, when they are evident and apparent.

This will certainly render our Perſons and Miniſtry infinitely contemptible, which is againſt that Apoſtolick Canon, *Let no man deſpiſe thee*, Titus 2. 15. That is, ſo to behave himſelf in his Miniſterial Office, as not to fall under contempt; and therefore this obliges the Conſcience, not to make our ſelves ridiculous, nor to render our Miniſtry, our Counſels, Exhortations, Preaching, Writing, of no effect, which is a thouſand times worſe than being ſilenced: Our Sufferings will Preach more effectually to the People, when we cannot Speak to them: but he who for Fear or Cowardize, or the Love of this World, betrays his Church and Religion by undue compliances, and will certainly be thought to do ſo, may continue to Preach, but to no purpoſe; and when we have rendred our ſelves ridiculous and contemptible, we ſhall then quickly fall, and fall unpitied.

There is nothing will ſo effectually tend to the final ruin of the Church of *England*, becauſe our Reading the Declaration will diſcourage, or provoke, or miſguide, all the Friends the Church of *England* has: can we blame any man for not preſerving the Laws and the Religion of our Church and Nation, when we our ſelves will venture nothing for it? can we blame any man for conſenting to Repeal

peal the *Test* and *Penal Laws*, when we recommend it to them by reading the Declaration? have we not reason to expect that the Nobility and Gentry, who have already suffered in this Cause, when they hear themselves condemned for it in all the Churches of *England*, will think it time to mend such a fault, and reconcile themselves to their Prince? and if our Church fall this way, is there any reason to expect that it should ever rise again? These Consequences are almost as evident as Demonstrations, and let it be what it will in it self, which I foresee will destroy the *Church of England* and the *Protestant Religion* and *Interest*, I think I ought to make as much conscience of doing it, as of doing the most immoral action in nature.

To say, that these mischievous consequences are not absolutely necessary, and therefore do not affect the Conscience, because we are not certain they will follow, is a very mean Objection; Moral Actions indeed have not such necessary consequences, as natural causes have necessary effects, because no moral causes act necessarily: reading the Declaration will not as necessarily destroy the Church of *England*, as fire burns Wood, but if the consequence be plain and evident, the most likely thing that can happen, if it be unreasonable to expect any other, if it be what is plainly intended and designed, either I must never have any regard to Moral Consequences of my Actions, or if ever they are to be considered, they are in this case.

Why are the Nobility and Gentry so extreamly averse to the Repeal of the Test and Penal Laws? why do they forfeit the King's Favour, and their Honourable Stations, rather then comply with it? if you say that this tends to destroy the Church of *England* and the Protestant Religion, I ask whether this be the necessary consequence of it? whether the King cannot keep his promise to the Church of *England* if the Test and Penal Laws be Repealed? We cannot say, but this may be: and yet the Nation does not think fit to try it; and we commend those great men who deny it; and if the same questions were put to us, we think we ought in Conscience to deny them our selves: and are there not as high probabilities, that our Reading the Declaration will promote the Repeal of the Test and Penal Laws, as that such a Repeal will ruine our Constitution, and bring in Popery upon us? Is it not as probable, that such a Complyance in us, will disoblige all the Nobility and Gentry, who have hitherto been firm to us, as that when the power of the Nation is put into Popish Hands, by the Repeal of such Tests and Laws, the Priests and Jesuits may find some *salvo* for the King's Conscience, and perswade him to forget his promise to the Church of *England*? and if the probable ill con-

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ſequences of Repealing the Teſt and Penal Laws, be a good reaſon not to comply with it, I cannot ſee but that the as probable ill conſequences of Reading the Declaration, is as good a reaſon not to read it.

The moſt material Objection is, that the Diſſenters, whom we ought not to provoke, will expound our not Reading it, to be the effect of a Perſecuting Spirit: Now I wonder men ſhould lay any weight on this, who will not allow the moſt probable conſequences of our Actions, to have any influence upon Conſcience: for if we muſt compare conſequences, to diſoblige all the Nobility and Gentry by Reading it, is likely to be much more fatal, than to anger the Diſſenters: and it is more likely, and there is much more reaſon for it, that one ſhould be offended than the other: For the Diſſenters who are Wiſe and conſidering, are ſenſible of the ſnare themſelves, and though they deſire Eaſe and Liberty, they are not willing to have it with ſuch apparent hazard of Church and State: I am ſure that thô we were never ſo deſirous that they might have their Liberty, (and when there is opportunity of ſhewing our inclinations without danger, they may find that we are not ſuch Perſecutors as we are repreſented) yet we cannot conſent that they ſhould have it this way, which they will find the deareſt Liberty that ever was granted.

This Sir, is our Caſe in ſhort, the Difficulties are great on both ſides, and therefore now if ever, we ought to beſiege Heaven with our Prayers, for Wiſdom, and Counſel, and Courage; that God would protect his Church and Reformed Chriſtianity, againſt all the devices of their Enemies: Which is the daily and hearty Prayer of,

SIR,

May 22. 1688. *Your Friend and Brother.*

POSTSCRIPT.

I Have juſt now ſeen H. Care's *Paper called,* The Public Occurrences, *which came out to day, and cannot but ſet you right as to his News about the Reading of the Declaration on* Sunday: *He tells you,* 'That ſeveral Divines *of the Church of* England, *in and about this* Ci-'ty, *eminent for their Piety and Moderation, did yeſterday Read his Majeſty's late Declara-'tion in their Churches, according to the Order in that behalf; but ſome (to the great ſur-'prize of their Pariſhoners) were pleaſed to* decline it. *You in the Country are from this Account to believe, that it was Read here by the generality of the Clergy, and by the eminent Men among them: but I can, and do aſſure you, that this is one of the moſt impudent Lyes that ever was printed: For as to this City which hath above a Hundred Pariſhes in it, it was Read only in Four or Five Churches, all the reſt, and beſt of the Clergy refuſing it every-where. I will ſpare their Names who read it; but ſhould I mention them, it would make you, who know this City, a little heartily to deride* H. C.'s *Account of them. And for the Surprize he talks of, the contray of it is ſo true, that in* Wood-ſtreet, *where it was Read by one Dr.* M. *the People generally went out of the Church. This I tell you, that you may be provided for the future againſt ſuch an impudent Lyar, who, for Bread, can vouch and put about the Nation, the falſeſt of things.* I am Yours.

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